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EXTENSION WORK IN MARKETING

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A radio talk by Dr. C. W. Warburton, Extension Service, delivered through Station WRC and 37 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, December 14, 1929.

Extension work from the beginning has been concerned with the improvement of living conditions on the farm. Not only have extension agents tried to assist farmers in producing better crops and livestock but they have also given attention to the marketing of these products. If the farms of America are to be made better places for rural people to live the most essential factor in this improvement is a larger net income for farmers. Much can be done in increasing the net income of the farmer through the use of better varieties of crops, improved production methods, better breeding and feeding of livestock, and more economic production generally, but it is quite as important for the farmer to receive a larger share of the consumer's dollar than he has been getting in recent years.

Recognizing the need for better marketing, extension agents have given much attention to the grading and standardization of crops and livestock so that farmers may put their products on the market in the form that is most acceptable to the consumer and for which he will pay the highest price. They have recognized also that in many instances producers do not receive the benefit from grading and standardization and from crop and livestock improvement unless they are in position to control the marketing of their products. For many years, therefore, they have been active in informing farmers on the principles of cooperative marketing and the advantages which accrue from the cooperative handling of farm products. Thousands of local shipping associations, creameries, cooperative elevators, and other purchasing or selling organizations have been formed by farmers on the initiative and largely through the efforts of county extension agents. In many cases these local associations have banded together to form district or State-wide marketing associations. Extension agents have also been active in aiding in the setting up of State or regional marketing associations, such as the cotton growers' cooperatives in the South.

A very real service which the extension folks have rendered to cooperative marketing is in supplying men for service and management positions. Go into almost any of the big cooperatives and you will find former extension workers on their staffs. For instance, the G.L.F. Exchange, the great cooperative purchasing association sponsored by the Grange, the Dairymen's League, and the Farm Bureau Federation in the State of New York, is very largely operated by men who received their earlier training in extension work.

With the passage of the Agricultural Marketing Act and the establishment of the Federal Farm Board, the cooperative marketing of agricultural products has definitely become a national policy in agriculture. With this new impetus to cooperative marketing and the determination on the part of the Federal Farm Board to improve the financial condition of American farmers through cooperative marketing, extension agents, more than ever before, are in position to render assistance to this important movement. Several conferences have been held between the Federal Farm Board and representatives of the agricultural colleges and extension services, in which agreement has been reached as to the part which extension workers are

to play in the program of the Federal Farm Board. While the Board will, for the present at least, devote its attention primarily to the setting up of national commodity marketing associations and the formation of State or regional associations which can market farm products through the national organizations, extension workers have an important work to do in informing individual farmers of the advantages of cooperative marketing and urging them to join local cooperatives so that they may participate in the benefits to be derived from cooperative handling of their products.

The success of a cooperative marketing association depends on many factors, one of the most important of which is the loyalty of its individual members. If the members of an organization do not deal fairly with it, then it has very little chance to succeed. The man who puts all the best apples or potatoes at the top of the barrel and the little ones in the middle, has no place in a cooperative. The man who agrees to sell his products through the cooperative and then, because of a slight temporary advantage, sells through some other agency, injures the organization which he has pledged to support. The farmer who can expect to get the greatest benefit from a cooperative marketing association is the one who contributes most to it in the way of producing a good article and in delivering it to his association in the condition most desired by the market.

The part of the extension agent in the program of the Federal Farm Board in promoting cooperative marketing, as I see it, is about as follows: The extension agent, more than ever before, should be active in informing the people in his county on the principles and practices of cooperative marketing; should aid them to produce the kinds and varieties of products which are in greatest demand; should keep them informed on grades and standards; and should bring to them the latest possible information on price trends, foreign and domestic supply and demand, and all other economic factors. Most important of all, he should tell what the cooperative association can be expected to do and what its limitations are. As the work of the association develops, he can aid its management in making local contacts and in keeping the individual members informed about the business of their organization. No cooperative can long be successful unless the members are fully informed about its business. It is their business and they have every right to know about it. If they know what it is doing and it is fairly successful in bringing monetary returns to them, they are likely to stick to it. The extension agent who knows the details of the business of a marketing association not only can help to keep the members informed and satisfied, but he can discuss its benefits with non-members and aid in creating a favorable attitude in their minds toward membership.

The Congress and the President have approved the Agricultural Marketing Act, which gives extremely broad powers to the Federal Farm Board to work for the betterment of agriculture. The Federal Farm Board and the Cooperative Extension Service have common cause, and each will render all possible assistance to the other in doing the work which the people of the nation have intrusted to it.
